

referred to David Wilhelm, chairman, Kathleen Vick, secretary, Lottie Shackelford, Martha Love, and Debra DeLee, vice chairs, Democratic National Committee.

Exchange With Reporters on Departure for New Brunswick, New Jersey

October 8, 1993

Secretary of Defense Les Aspin

Q. Are you going to support Les Aspin?

The President. Well, yes. I mean, what is the question in reference to? I'm sorry.

Q. In reference to all the complaints on Capitol Hill about his performance.

The President. Well, I will say again, I asked Secretary Aspin why the extra—weren't sent to Somalia. He said to me that when they were asked for, there was no consensus among the Joint Chiefs that it should be done. And he normally relied on their reaching a consensus recommendation on an issue like that, a military—[inaudible]. And secondly that it was never suggested to him that they were needed for the kind of defensive purposes that it's been speculated that they're useful for during this last raid, that it was only for offensive purposes, and that it was his best judgment that we were trying to get the political track going again, and we didn't want to send a signal that we were trying to conduct more offense in Somalia. He also said if anybody had made the defensive argument, that would have been an entirely different thing. And obviously if he had known then what he knows now, he would have made a different decision.

Q. Mr. President, did you know about the request in advance, sir?

The President. Did I know? No.

Q. Were you told—[inaudible]—and also do you think—

The President. No. And I was talking to General Powell on a very regular basis about this whole thing. This was not something that anybody brought to me directly.

Somalia

Q. Why won't the Somali warlords just go underground for 6 months and wait for us to get out and then declare victory? Isn't

there a danger in giving them a deadline when we're going to get out?

The President. Well, it might happen. But keep in mind, we're going to wind up—by then there should be an even larger U.N. force there. And that's our objective. In 6 months, we will have been there well over a year longer than we ever committed to stay.

So we will have given them well over a year longer, more personnel, and more efforts in this endeavor. We have obligations elsewhere, including this very important effort that we've invested a lot in in Haiti, to try to support that. So, I just don't believe that we can be in a position of staying longer than that.

I also think once we send a signal to them that we're not going to tolerate people messing with us or trying to hurt our people or trying to interrupt the U.N. mission, that we have no interest in denying anybody access to playing a role in Somalia's political future. I think a mixed message has been sent out there in the last couple of months by people who are doing the right thing. Our people are doing the right thing. They're trying to keep our folks alive, trying to keep the peace-keeping mission going, trying to get the food out there. But we need to clearly state, unambiguously, that our job is not to decide who gets to play a role in post-war Somalia, that we want the political process to work. So let's give it a chance to work and see if it does.

Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 12:20 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Proclamation 6607—Leif Erikson Day, 1993

October 8, 1993

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

At this time every year, Americans celebrate Leif Erikson Day. In so doing, we commemorate the voyages of the great Norse ex-